Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MEXICO 05384 260045Z

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2430
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C O N F I D E N T I A L MEXICO 5384

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR SCUL MX CU
SUBJECT: CUBAN MINISTER OF EDUCATION VISITS MEXICO

1. SUMMARY: CUBAN MINISTER OF EDUCATION HAS ARRIVED IN MEXICO FOR FIVE-DAY OFFICIAL VISIT OSTENSIBLY RELATED TO EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL MATTERS. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT HE HAS EXPRESSED PARTICULAR INTEREST IN SEEING MRS. HORTENSIA ALLENDE. END SUMMARY.

2. CUBAN MINISTER OF EDUCATION MAJOR JOSE RAMON FERNANDEZ ALVAREZ ARRIVED IN MEXICO CITY JUNE 24 FOR FIVE-DAY OFFICIAL VISIT WHICH, ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, WILL FOCUS ON VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS (IN PARTICULAR THE COMPUTER CENTER AT THE GOM SCHOOL-CONSTRUCTION AGENCY KNOWN AS CAPFCE) AND ON CUSTOMARY TOURIST ATTRACTIONS. VISIT IS IN RESPONSE TO GOM INVITATION, AND FERNANDEZ IN ARRIVAL PRESS CONFERENCE MADE POINT THAT CUBA HAS REPEATEDLY INVITED HIS MEXICAN COUNTERPART, VICTOR BRAVO AHUJA, TO VISIT CUBA BUT PRESS OF DUTIES HAS SO FAR PREVENTED HIS DOING SO.

3. FERNANDEZ WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE FOLLOWING: "MAJOR" RAFAEL BERNAL, IDENTIFIED HERE AS "VICE MINISTER" OF EDUCATION BUT WHO ACCORDING TO APRIL 1974 REFERENCE IS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MEXICO 05384 260045Z

(DR.) RAFAEL BERNAL ALEMAN, DEPUTY CHIEF OF VICE-MINISTRY

Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

FOR TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION; JOSE MARTINEZ, "JEFE DEL DESPACHO" OF MINED; AND ARMANDO MARTINEZ, IDENTIFIED AS A FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL.

4. FERNANDEZ AND PARTY WERE MET BY LOCAL CUBAN AMB. FERNANDO LOPEZ MUINO AND BY BRAVO AHUJA. IN STATEMENTS TO PRESS, TWO MINISTERS ENGAGED IN EXCHANGE OF STATISTICS. FERNANDEZ NOTED THAT CUBA HAD ONE MILLION ILLITERATES IN 1961 BUT THROUGH "GIGANTIC CAMPAIGN" HAD BROUGHT FIGURE DOWN TO PROBABLY IRREDUCIBLE MINIMUM OF FOUR PERCENT ONE PAPER) OR FIVE PERCENT (OTHER PAPERS) OF CURRENT NINE-MILLION POPULATION. BRAVO AHUJA REPLIED THAT MEXICO'S ILLITERACY RATE NOW STANDS AT 19 PERCENT, MAJORITY OF THOSE BEING ADULTS IN HARD-TO-REACH COMMUNITIES OF FEWER THAN 200 INHABITANTS. NEVERTHELESS, GOM HOPES TO LOWER RATE TO 14 OR 15 PERCENT "WITHIN THREE YEARS." BRAVO AHUJA ADDED THAT MEXICO MUST ACCOMMODATE 400,000 STUDENTS ANNUALLY. GOM, HE CLAIMS, IS MEETING THIS GOAL WITH ROOM TO SPARE BY TRAINING 15,000 TEACHERS ANNUALLY AND CALCULATING 40 STUDENTS PER TEACHER. IN SOMEWHAT CONFUSING RETURN STATISTICAL VOLLEY, FERNANDEZ SAID CUBA STUDENT/TEACHER RATIO IS NOW 40:1 BUT HIS GOVT HOPES REACH "MEXICAN RATIO OF 30:1."

5. COMMENT: WHILE PUBLISHED PROGRAM FOR FERNANDEZ VISIT APPEARS ENTIRELY ROUTINE, EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT HE HAS EXPRESSED PRTICULAR INTEREST IN MEETING WITH HORTENSIA BUSSI, WIDOW OF LATE CHILEAN PRES. SALVADOR ALLENDE.

6. THIS IS ONLY LATEST OF SERIES OF CABINET-LEVEL VISITS IN BOTH DIRECTIONS. APART FROM REPORT ABOUT INTEREST IN VISITING MRS. ALLENDE, WE HAVE NO OTHER BASIS FOR JUDGING SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS VISIT. WE ARE, HOWEVER, HIGHLY SKEPTICAL OF BRAVO AHUJA'S STATISTICS ON ILLITERACY.
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Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

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